

only copy - Please return to Chris Harlowe

A Goshen patriarch, Mr. Jim Camp, owner of Camp's Drive In and after whom Camp Street is named, says that only twelve years ago there were five or six houses and dozens of tents in Goshen. "Today this is an improved town. Probably only a few communities have changed so fast."

Tumbledown shacks abound in Goshen today, but no tents. And in the past three years thirty new homes of \$10,000 value have been built. In most cases these homes have meant improved conditions for persons who have lived in the town for some length of time. In many ways Goshen has been a pilot project for a long caravan of do-gooders, including projects directed by the AFSC and the California Migrant Ministry. Some results of these projects are gratifying examples of what effect community development can have on a town. There is needed a comprehensive survey of the community to determine attitudes toward these "outsiders" who have worked for, in, and with Goshen.

Because nearly every resident has seen harder times, there is, I believe, a tendency in Goshen to exercise care to protect status. This is particularly true for Anglo residents, many of whom are the "Grapes of Wrath" families of the thirties. These individualists have felt intense hatred from the Californian establishment, thanks mainly to the disaster which struck their midwestern origins during the dust bowl days. These people have become the outcasts and scape-goats of the new Western society. Even today "Okie" and "Arkie" are terms of division.

Nevertheless, these Anglos have made of Goshen a place in the sun. They are established and they are not going to be dislodged. Nor do they easily fall for new progressive programs such as the UCC "modernist" suggested in the Community Center Project.

One of the defense mechanisms built by these Anglos to counteract the rejection suffered in California is the conservative church. Often labeled as an institution irrelevant to the world in which we live, sect-type churches are really in part mirrors of the irrelevancy of the status seeking protestant churches of the slumbering suburbs. Sect churches persist in Goshen because for decades the "respectable" churches sought to ignore the "Okies" of that community. It is, in fact, partly an admission of its own sinful nature that the United Church of Christ had to enter Goshen under the guise of community development, knowing that it would be rebuffed flatly and soundly if it came as a worshipping communion.

In general the conservative attitude toward the world is not true of the Mexican Americans of Goshen. Though half of the time they are exploited, these people are enjoying improved economic standards in comparison to their relatives south of the border. Probably because of the improved conditions he finds in America, the individual Mexican American is optimistic about the future and responds to suggestions of how to improve his personal situation as well as his community.

The Negroes of Goshen were quite willing to work but since there are few Negro children, they did not have the immediate concern for the programs of the community center. By far, however, the Negro population is in the worst economic situation, and many have resigned themselves to a life of T.V. and fishing.

With these varying attitudes toward the UCC project it is little surprise to find that the fundamental problem we have sought to solve is unanimity of purpose amongst Goshen residents. Racial discrimination is less a problem than social differentiation. Thus, Goshen Anglos have status in Goshen but are more or less rejected by Tulare County elite. But, Mexican Americans, whose status suffers locally due to Anglo ascendancy in Goshen, (said one Mexican woman to the president of the Goshen Chamber of Commerce, "When did you ever invite us to take part in your meetings) are more accepted on the broader level of society. They are looked upon as the "honest-good-poor-people-who-we-all-love-and-need-to-harvest-our-crops". Therefore, we had strong response from Mexican Americans to "improve Goshen" (and win a measure of self-importance and status), with an ironic response of resentment from Anglo "Okies" who felt a challenge to their supremacy.

The result has been antagonism toward the Goshen Community Center by religiously conservative Anglos, using moral arguments ("they dance at the center, you know") as excuses to ignore its valid purposes.

It would be a pleasure to "write off" this group of people as "hopeless" were it not for the fact that their antagonism has its origin in the rejection they have felt from the establishment of California. Having been rejected, they reject. The roots of their fear and anger can be traced directly to the low esteem in which they have been held. The language of this low esteem I have heard in numerous "liberal" Protestant churches in the valley.

This is not to say we are without Anglo friends in Goshen. There are many "native" residents who have a deep sense of fair-play for everyone. The chairman of the Community Center, Don Halstead, is a Goshen farmer whose views on agricultural policy are typically "grower" but whose sense of openness to all persons, regardless of race or religion, is inspiring. These Goshen liberals were quite often at a loss to explain the lack of cooperation of the Pentecostal "Okies". It has been through a combined effort of Mexican-Americans and native Goshenites that the project has succeeded.

To conclude, what evaluations and suggestions can be made of the Community Center project? First, it seems clear now that the move from rented buildings to the new, yet unfinished center has greatly improved the "image" of the project. The obvious sign was in the number of Anglo children who began attending activities there. In one boy's club an Anglo was elected president, and when a dinner was made to raise money for the building several new people came forward to help. (New help is looked upon with some suspicion by Mexican Americans who from the first believed in the project. They ask, "Why all this help now, and not before?")

Second, over the years the Board (9 people) of the center has had to make many critical decisions. They have grown immensely. Like many boards, they expect direction and detail-work from their staff person. But their sense of responsibility has broadened to include

racial incidents as well as program. Probably the highpoint in their career came in their examination of Phil Farnham for the position of Community Center Director. They interrogated him for 45 minutes, gave him a unanimous vote of approval, and then instructed him to "get out to North Dakota, pack his suitcases, and get back to Goshen as fast as he could travel.

Third, the community would like to see the building finished as soon as possible, and the new director, after getting settled, will probably be wise to approach the Conference and National Board for help in financing the completion of the center. So far these instrumentalities have assisted in procuring the land, but the building has been constructed without direct assistance from the conference.

Fourth, as soon as the building is taken care of, the matter of program can be tackled. The possibilities and challenges here are unlimited. Except for what the center offers in the way of creative program the lives of hundreds of Goshen children and adults is a void. The process of organizing the center and the headaches of getting into a functional building served the past director as stumbling blocks to a truly well rounded program. One special project the Goshen teens have mentioned for the last year is a work camp in Mexico. These teens have been on the receiving end for too long, and feel the strong desire to give for a change.

Finally, I sincerely believe the Community Center should and can be just what the name implies. Goshen has no center, it is a conglomeration, with no self government. Community crises generally go unattended simply because leadership is not exercised. There are groups in Goshen who exist for the purpose of warring with one another. The Community Center director has the position and the concerned people behind him to lift up new vistas for the town. This function of the project was foreseen by the initiators of the work, but as of yet the real job has not been touched.

Jim Drake